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SONNETS

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SONNETS

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BY

FREDERIC FAIRCHILD SHERMAN

NEW YORK

CHRISTMASTIDE

MCMXV

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LADY INNES
Painted by Thomas Gainsborough

THE MUSIC LESSON
Painted by Johannes Vermeer

ST. FRANCIS BEFORE HIS CELL
Painted by Giovanni Bellini

THE POLISH RIDER
Painted by Rembrandt van Rijn

THE FORGE
Painted by Francisco de Goya

THE COTTAGE AMONG THE TREES
Painted by Meindert Hobbema

LADY INNES

Painted by Thomas Gainsborough

This is the portrait of a personage,
No painted image of the common sort
Of Beauty that is found at every Court,
Her history oft' a blot upon its page.
The artist had no need of any stage
But Nature's own his likeness to support
Of her whose character this true report
Men's interest forever will engage.

Dear little Lady of the long ago,
As regal in your beauty as the rose
That blooms beside you in the garden there,
How good it is to meet you and to know
That sweet sincerity that buds and blows
Fresh as a flower in your face, and as fair!

THE MUSIC LESSON

Painted by Johannes Vermeer

How subtly fine the notes of color seem
That here have turned mere paint to melody
In such a fashion one can almost see
The very music in the glow and gleam
Where from the brush it flowed a silvery stream,
Or heavenly blue, so rhythmically free
Its song once sensed will never let us be
But haunts us as Love's voice a lover's dream.

This little canvas painted by Vermeer
Is called "The Music Lesson" to this day
But this is what it is a picture of,—
A maiden happy with her lover near,
And Cupid listening for him to say
Those words that are the very song of love!

ST. FRANCIS BEFORE HIS CELL

Painted by Giovanni Bellini

Barefooted, in a simple robe of brown,
St. Francis stands before his rock-hewn cell
Here in the dawn, and from his lips there swell
Praises of God that echo up and down
These hills and vales,— touched now with bright renown
Of sacred soil, because one God loved well
Among them chose alone with Him to dwell,
Beyond the walls of yonder little town.

In all the beauty of Bellini's art
There is no page more lovely than this one
Whereon he pictured with supreme success,
And all the wisdom of a thinking heart,
St. Francis standing where the rising sun
Lights up the world with living loveliness.

THE POLISH RIDER

Painted by Rembrandt van Rijn

Who is this rider of the tasselled steed
That steps so high and champs the silver bit?
How easy in his saddle doth he sit
Gazing afar, unmindful of its speed,—
As though he looked upon some grassy mead
With all the hanging lamps of heaven lit,
And saw Love there among the shadows flit,
Where Pleasure waits upon them who succeed.

Is it not Youth upon his charger white,
All armed with sword and bow, who rides away
Upon the great adventure that is Life?
His is the task some ancient wrong to right,
Some enemy of God and man to slay,
Or die himself there in the thick of strife!

THE FORGE

Painted by Francisco de Goya

How strong the mighty Spaniard's magic brush
Has struck the deeper chords of color here
Making for us, without a doubt or fear,
Another masterpiece, where all the rush
Of life gathered in one crescendo crush
Of molten melody seems to uprear
Itself, forging in living fire a spear
To bring the blood of every idler's blush!

The glow of Goya in a bit of flame
Lightens the darkness of the shadowed place,
And touches with strange manliness the mask
That Labor wears forevermore,—the same
Determination stamped on every face
Intent upon its own appointed task.

THE COTTAGE AMONG THE TREES

Painted by Meindert Hobbema

This country road is the old path of Peace
That takes the tired heart home again to rest
After the weary years of futile quest.
How sweet it is here where the noises cease
To watch above the drifting white cloud-fleece
And hear the sounds of Nature we love best,
Knowing that in this refuge of the blest
We too have found at last Life's great Release.

The humble cottage is a home for us,
For Time has hallowed it forevermore
With memories of childhood's happy hours,
And young Love's dream, so brief but glorious,
Still haunts the waiting threshold of its door
With the dear welcome fragrance of the flowers.

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